

# SILENT QUEST

## EXERCISE SERIES

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### Introduction

The future operating environment that Army special operations forces will face in the coming decades will continue to be complex and multidimensional. General Raymond Odierno, chief of staff of the Army, addressed this concern in “Marching Orders”: “Army leaders accept that there are no predetermined solutions to problems. Army leaders adapt their thinking, formations, and employment techniques to the specific situation they face. This requires an adaptable and innovative mind, a willingness to accept prudent risk in unfamiliar or rapidly changing situations, and an ability to adjust based on continuous assessment. Accordingly, thorough understanding and wise application of cultural knowledge and language skills are tantamount to our success. So too are training, leader development, and personnel policies aimed at fostering creativity at every level.” As a means to move forward and adapt in preparation for the challenges and opportunities of the future operating environment and improve cross-domain synergy, the commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, published *ARSOF 2022*. This document discusses the importance of using experimentation to explore what capabilities and capacities are required to meet future threats; one of the key venues for this directed experimentation and exploration is USASOC’s Silent Quest exercise series.

Silent Quest is an exercise set within the USASOC Campaign of Learning that builds on future operating environment-based concepts and consists of two exercises a year; the inaugural event occurred in 2013. The Military Information Support Operations Command led the planning, coordination, design and execution of the exercise series with the MISOC commander serving as the exercise director. The objective of the Silent Quest exercise series is to examine ARSOF structures, cultures and processes in order to identify capability and capacity gaps and seams and then inform potential mitigation to those gaps and seams through doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, facilities and policy solutions. Additionally, Silent Quest outputs inform reports and programing activities such as the Program Objective Memorandum, the Strategic Planning Process, and the Quadrennial Defense Review.

The Silent Quest exercise series is further nested both within the U.S. Special Operations Command’s Shadow exercises and the U.S. Army’s Unified Quest exercise. Through the exploration of Silent Quest and its attention to special operations and conventional force interdependence and unified action partners, USA-

SOC is able to examine its vision and posture to shape, prevent and win in a future area of operations with the smallest footprint, ensuring it is adaptive enough to find, fix and finish modern, adaptive and learning adversaries.

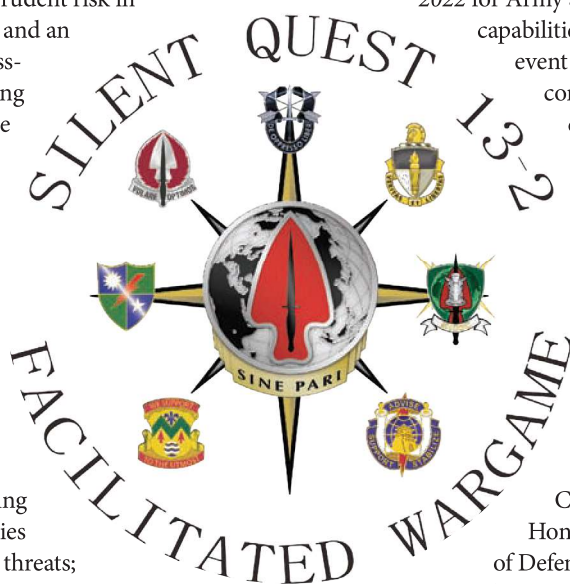
### The Inaugural Event

In March 2013, USASOC conducted Silent Quest 13-1 the first exercise in which USASOC challenged its operational concepts for *ARSOF 2022* for Army and joint force campaigns. SQ 13-1 utilized a capabilities-based, facilitated wargame as the capstone event in a series of preceding enabling events conducted in the months prior that informed the development of ARSOF future concepts and SOF design initiatives anticipated to be in place by 2022.

Through the use of the enabling events designed to provide inputs to the overall capstone event, Silent Quest planners produced a script that captured content which enabled a smooth-flowing, facilitated wargame. Utilizing the facilitated wargame as a format and participation from key participants such as Ambassador Alberto Fernandez (Coordinator, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications) and the Honorable Michael Sheehan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, USASOC was able to simulate a multiyear inter-agency / SOF Campaign within the anticipated future operational environment. Set at the strategic- to operational-level, the USASOC campaign design provided a platform to visualize and execute SOF Mission Command and the full-suite of ARSOF capabilities across four operations: shaping, unconventional warfare, strategic raid and stability operations. As a result of SQ 13-1, USASOC gained a much better appreciation and understanding of the Human Domain; cohesive SOF effort; the Strategic Landpower Line of Effort for Joint Force Operations in 2022; a better informed *ARSOF 2022* concept; and the ability to provide input to the USSOCOM Shadow exercises and U.S. Army’s Unified Quest exercise.

Silent Quest 13-2, executed in September 2013, was the final facilitated wargame exercise of the fiscal year in the USASOC Campaign of Learning Experimentation Line of Effort. SQ 13-2 was designed to examine future operating concepts of USASOC’s subordinate commands and units, and its support to Army/Joint Force campaigns at the strategic- and operational-levels in a future operating environment within the Central Command area of responsibility.

Through this “SOF Campaign within an exercise concept,” USASOC was able to further develop the concept of SOF Operational



Design and contribute to the development of a cadre of SOF Campaign Planners who can provide the understanding and the ability to plan for the implementation of the full range of special warfare and surgical strike capabilities. The outcomes from these events informed the process determining what capabilities are required to meet future strategic and operational challenges that ARSOF will encounter. Discussions from senior participants such as Ambassador (Retired) Victoria Huddleston, Lt. Gen. Charles Cleveland, commanding general, USASOC and Admiral William McRaven, commander, USSOCOM provided key guidance and insight into the developments of both USASOC and component subordinate commands' and units' working groups to explore future concepts. SQ 13-2 was also impacted by two separate but related parallel efforts: SOF Operational Design and the Hybrid Corps concept. The objective of SOF Operational Design is to build campaigns to prevent, shape and win in uncertain and politically sensitive environments where the political support and national will for significant force structure is limited while achieving the required military portion of the national strategic end-state. As we began to appreciate the full scope of changes inherent in the future operational environments represented in SQ 13-1 and SQ 13-2, USASOC determined that SOF require a new planning process

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with a unique set of elements and flow to remain relevant and effective in multi-year, enduring ARSOF campaigns. This determination resulted in the development of SOF Operational Design and the accompanying production of the *USASOC Planner's Handbook for SOF Operational Design*. The Silent Quest exercise series, which included SOF Campaigns and both the SQ 13-1 and SQ 13-2 scripts, formed supporting materials, effectively providing practical examples of the “how to” contained in the handbook itself.

According to TRADOC PAM 525-3-0, *The U.S. Army Capstone Operating Concept*, dated Dec. 19, 2012, the future Army requires the capability to achieve special operations and conventional force interdependence through education and via a range of personnel, command and support relationships across all activities and operations within the operational environment to support Unified Land Operations. *ARSOF 2022's* vision on SOF mission command states that ARSOF will possess a wide array of scalable and deployable mission command and communications nodes, capable of projecting SOF Mission Command in the most austere and politically sensitive environments.

SQ 13-1 allowed us to experiment with operational- and tactical-level headquarters for conducting special warfare, including a Joint Special Warfare Command capable of conducting global special warfare activities in support of a theater special operations command and national objectives. During SQ 13-2, USASOC teamed with U.S. Army Forces Command to discuss the concept of a hybrid (SOF/CF) corps-level headquarters with organic interagency and intergovernmental plug-ins designed to conduct counterinsurgency, humanitarian assistance, foreign internal defense and limited combined arms maneuver.

This past year, the Silent Quest series has also been instrumental in operationalizing USASOC Continental United States-based resources and capabilities. Through the exploration of utilizing a separate command, to be named, concept within USASOC to synchronize these platforms, USASOC has developed specialized platforms such as the MISOC Effects Group, the Office of Special Warfare, the Civil Military Advisory Group and the Institute for Military Support to Governance. For example, through the MEG, the MISOC and USASOC better connect and synchronize the CONUS-based strategic- and operational-level interagency and intergovernmental entities to support inform and influence efforts of the geographic combatant commanders, Army Service Component Commands and theater special operations commands in support of U.S. national security. These elements will feed into the separate command concept and provide a capability to form the trained and ready core of campaigning special operations joint task forces. The USASOC separate command will also provide a consolidated Title X overwatch responsible for the training, readiness and validation of the deployment of select ARSOF. Working in conjunction with the TSOCs, the command will provide enduring CONUS-based regional expertise with increased efficiencies and effectiveness.

## Future Experimental Exercises

Silent Quest 14-1, scheduled for spring 2014, will again examine a regional future operational environment at the strategic and operational level, examining the complex problems USASOC will contend with in the future. The exercise will focus on maintaining operational continuity and appropriate levels of effort as transition occurs from a SOJTF to a SOC Forward, providing support to conduct global and regional influence activities, enabling the TSOC to synchronize regional foreign internal defense, as well as counterproliferation efforts against a regional adversary.

## Conclusion

USASOC is USSOCOM's intellectual foundry for Special Warfare, SOF Campaigning, and the development of innovative organizational structures that will meet new challenges and seize opportunities in the future operating environment. Utilizing Silent Quest as an experimentation venue prepares an enterprise of special operations forces, conventional forces and JIIM team members at the strategic- and operational-levels to envision and develop multiyear campaigns. The lessons learned in Silent Quest are being applied to the development of SOF; creating a range of inputs across the DOTMLPF-P, POM, SPP and QDR construct; and informing both the Army's and USSOCOM's efforts to define its future operating concepts for the Theater Special Operations Commands, Global SOF Network, and Strategic Landpower Task Force. **SW**

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